

sense. If they did not, then this argument which the gentleman paraded before the House with so much seeming gratification to himself and friends, is emasculated and shorn of all strength and power and falls to the ground. For it must be conceded that the rule of interpretation sanctioned by the law and by common sense is that every written document must be interpreted according to the intention of those who executed it.

But I understand the gentleman to insist that the fathers of the Revolution when they used those memorable words on that most solemn occasion had the case of the negro slaves of the country in contemplation, and intended to assert for them equality and the "inalienable" right to "liberty." Look for one moment at the facts of history. Negro slavery on the 4th of July, 1776, existed in all the thirteen colonies. Jefferson, Washington, and most of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were slaveholders, lived and died slaveholders. Now, if the theory of the abolitionists be correct, then must those pure and disinterested patriots of the Revolution be convicted of the foulest wrong, the grossest injustice in denying to the negro race rights which they on a most solemn occasion, in a most solemn and emphatic manner declared was their birth-right and heritage. As one proud of their glorious history I am unwilling that its brightness should be obscured, or its purity tarnished by the imputation of injustice such as the abolitionists would lay at their door. In the name of that patriotic band of men, the signers of the Declaration of Independence, many of whom lived and died slaveholders, I protest against any such interpretation being placed upon their words. I protest in the name of the illustrious four whose portraits adorn the walls of the Senate chamber of this capitol, one of whom reposes in death beneath the sod of his native county of Charles and whose descendants and kindred I represent on this floor. I protest in the name of that great soldier of the Revolution, Smallwood, whose mortal remains are commingling with the clods of his native valley in the county I have the honor in part to represent, near the spot that marks the last resting place of his great leader-in-arms, the patriot Washington.

But, Mr. President, the Declaration of Independence, whether true or false, whether interpreted correctly or incorrectly, forms no part of our present system. It has performed its allotted part in the great drama of human events and is not to be looked to for light and instruction upon the questions of the living present. Surely after the experience of the past week no one here need be reminded that the Constitution of the United States has swept away whatever there was inconsistent with its provisions in any antecedent system, and that it is now the supreme

law of the land. In that Constitution, I affirm without fear of successful contradiction, although the word slave is not employed, that the institution of slavery is recognized as a standing institution of the land. Its existence is recognized in article 1, sections 2 and 9, and in article 4, section 2, and every one at all conversant with the political history of the country knows that without such recognition and protection as was therein guaranteed, this Union never could have been formed.

Far back in the early days of the Colony of Maryland, history records the fact of the existence of negro slavery in our midst, and through all the intervening period up to the present time it has been steadfastly upheld and sustained by the legislature, executive, and judicial departments of our State government.

The Constitutional Convention of 1850 positively enjoined the Legislature from interfering with the relation existing between master and slave, and to-day the spectacle of a Convention deliberating in these halls upon the organic law of the State finds its only explanation in the fact that the people have elevated this species of property into a sphere of existence far higher and above that of any other property. Scarcely fourteen years have rolled away and the safeguards and barriers of protection thrown around this species of property by the Constitution of 1850, are about to be overturned and broken down. The institution of slavery, coeval with our existence almost as a people, uprooted and destroyed without one word of premonition so as to enable the people to prepare for the extraordinary inconveniences which the sudden destruction of an institution interwoven almost with their very existence must necessarily entail upon them, and without one dollar to compensate them for the thousands they have invested in negro property. Now, in view of all the antecedent legislation of the State on this subject, I insist that a fouler wrong, a grosser injustice is done her citizens than if the blow was aimed at any other species of property. In proportion to the stability, security, and protection imparted to any article of property, men invest their means in that property. The friendly legislation that has been unvaryingly adopted by the State from the earliest period up to the present time has operated as an invitation to all of her citizens to invest their capital in slaves, to purchase them at high prices. Her faith and her honor by reason of her action in the past have, as it were, been pledged for the security and maintenance of this species of property. To-day a Constitutional Convention claiming to represent the sovereignty of the State, with ruthless and despoiling hand, seeks to undo that which the legislation of centuries has contributed to build up, and to deprive with-